

Awase is the newsletter of the

Aikido Institute of Davis, a dojo where you can learn the arts of Aikido and Tai Chi.

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Seminar Nuggets

Hoa Newens Sensei

During this year (2013) I had the opportunity to teach Aikido at several seminars at various locations, regionally and internationally. At these seminars, due to time constraint I had to distill the teaching into key points that are simple but pregnant with meaning so that people can remember and use them. These points are expressed in simple and direct language. In this edition of Awase I share a few of these key points with the hope that some of them resonate with you and are useful in your training.

Movement and Stillness

To become good at randori, practice blending,
To blend well, practice techniques,
To master techniques, practice tai sabaki,
To excel at tai sabaki, practice stances,
To get strong stances, practice stillness.

What Are You Not Saying?

Clelia Clark

I never know what to expect when I walk into a medical school interview. Almost without exception, however, all of my interviewers have taken some degree of interest in Aikido. Some have never heard of it and are looking for an explanation. Others are more surprised. “Did I see you won some sort of gentleman’s award?” asked one of my interviewers. “Well I do martial arts...I suppose that’s kind of masculine,” I replied. “Yes! Martial arts! That’s it. Tell me more.”

An important question most of the schools have is, of course, how will your experiences in Aikido make you a better physician? It took a little bit of time to narrow down my answer. Most Aikido addicts will likely reassure you that Aikido can make you better at anything. Your heightened awareness will help you avoid accidents on the road when other drivers mindlessly slog through traffic. Your new ability to focus your ki will help you slice fruit more adroitly than ever. Your suburi muscles will help you effortlessly twist off the lid to the pickle jar as your friends and family look upon you with wonder and envy. The list is endless! However, rather than enumerate these various benefits, I focused on a single important benefit: we learn to hear what people are not saying.

This is a skill we often learn in our training without making a conscious effort. Once we begin to extend our sphere of awareness beyond ourselves and include our uke, we can begin to pick up on a variety of unspoken messages. A shoulder suddenly tightening during a pin might reflect an old injury. Full body rigidity when being grabbed at the throat can indicate personal or emotional discomfort with the type of attack. Resistance and hesitancy at the time of the throw is understandable in someone who is not yet fully comfortable with falling and rolling.

The next step is to make adjustments and respond to these messages. Go easy on tensed up joints, control the energy of your attack, and reassure your uke as you guide them through a controlled fall. Listen to what your partner is not verbally saying and act accordingly. This principle can be expanded to daily life. People are sending out hundreds of messages everyday with their posture, physical proximity, and expression. From an interview standpoint, being in tune with these silent messages will lead to improved interactions with my patients in the future, but it's also just a generally useful skill to have in any profession and in daily life.

Aikido gives us a mechanism to listen to both mind and body of those around us. You might not even be aware of this additional skill you've been acquiring during your time on the mat, but I encourage you to tap into it and recognize its power. Listen to what people are not saying aloud and learn from it.

Discipline

Donny Shiu

It is human nature to seek comfort and pleasure, and to avoid discomfort, pain, danger, etc. This instinct is appropriate and wise for survival and self-preservation. Can too much of a good thing be a problem? The answer is yes. For example, eating sweets may be pleasurable, being a "couch potato" may be comfortable, but too much is not wise. Fortunately, most of us can make conscious decisions

to keep these urges in check; this is called discipline.

In the context of learning aikido, effort in training is required, because you get what you put into it. Training can be filled with struggles as one tries

Ukemi

To receive well you must
 First, connect with the nage's center,
 Then open and surrender;
 Next, absorb the impact of the oncoming energy by aligning with gravity,
 While remaining connected with nage.

to learn and acquire new skills. Fortunately, comfort grows through persistent training. The skills become easier and more comfortable to execute. The concepts and philosophies also become less foreign through application on and off the mat. Going from being uncomfortable and not knowing, to being comfortable and competent is a good thing. Through desire and hard work, the once impossible becomes possible. This reward comes with a price. The price is time and effort driven by your discipline and desire.

Feel like training tonight?



Sensei, Kori, and Toby with their hosts in Amsterdam. Picture courtesy of Kori Farrell.

Around the World

Kori Farrell

In late August of this year, Sensei, Phoebe, Toby and I boarded a plane to Denmark. We were met in Copenhagen, fed lots of good food, and taken for long walks (and a boat ride) around the city for a day and a half leading up to the seminar.

Toby and I were hosted by David Gottlieb, a long time aikidoka who has visited the Davis dojo! He was incredibly generous to us, and took much of his time to show our group around Copenhagen. His dedication to Aikido and teaching was very inspiring, and we learned a lot from our stay with him. I will always remember exploring the intricacies of shomen uchi iriminage in the small space between the refrigerator, dining room table, and kitchen counter in his cozy seventh floor flat!

In Copenhagen Sensei taught a two-day seminar to the local students as well as several students from Sweden. That weekend the weather swayed between clear, sunny skies and cold, windy downpours. Most of the training was done inside a local school gym, though we were able to run out for a bukiwaza class between showers.

At the beginning of the first day Sensei encouraged everyone to forget everything they knew about Aikido and join him in building techniques up from the beginning. The students on the mat were excited to hear what Sensei had to teach them, and the training was lively. I was happy to be able to reconnect with many students I had met in the previous year's seminar, and grateful to everyone there for the wonderful training spirit.

The following weekend, we flew to Holland, and were welcomed in Amsterdam by our wonderful hosts, whom we had met the previous year at the Copenhagen Iwama Gasshuku. We were treated to more good food and a walking tour of the city, as well as a boat ride through the canals. In the days we were there, I silently took several more notes on how to be a good host, should any of them choose to visit California! (Thank you Margueritte).

The training in Amsterdam was very inspiring for all of us. The students and teachers there are dedicated and focused, and the training was clear and invigorating. While there are differences in the forms they practice, the sincerity of the training allowed everyone on the mat to be open to learning from one

another.

What a special opportunity! I always gain new insight when I see Sensei teach in other dojos. It is as though he speaks to a group in whatever Aiki dialect it is that they need to hear, and training in these classes I get to learn his teachings in a different light. There is also something wonderful and inspiring about making connections with other students halfway around the world. Aikido is a language that we can speak to one another on the mat, no matter where we come from. To know that there are groups of people in other countries who are as dedicated and sincere in their training fills me with joy... and hope!



Saying goodbye to Amsterdam. Courtesy of Kori Farrell.

Convention in Aikido

Remy Cordier

One of the sempai in class mentioned that aikido is a “Martial Art” with convention. We have in fact many defined grabs from which we derive some specific techniques. We define the convention of attack from katate, gyakute, kata dori, morote dori or shomen uchi and from there we engage in a specific technique. These techniques are usually practiced with a partner, but then the convention becomes a little bit more

complex. We might have potentially two different persons with different conventions clashing against each other, or totally out of synchronization, or simply practicing automatically anticipating the agreed convention.

Alignment with gravity

To align with gravity

While standing and moving, keep the central axis vertical,

While rolling, shape the body into a ball to absorb gravity into its center.

Here are some examples where I found two aikidoists practicing with very different convention.

During a seminar, we were practicing Shomen Uchi Ikkyo, so I was expanding my Shomen Uchi toward my partner ready to perform Ikkyo. As I am ready to do the technique my partner collapses his forearm on his chest, and then I retreat. Then we repeat the same transaction three times and I have no clue what is going on. Then that person finally explained to me that I have to expand my shomen uchi even more and go to his throat if his arm collapses so he can feel the threat and react in a way that I can perform Ikkyo.

Another example is when we practice with beginners; they don’t necessarily know how to hold a grab, or how to flow with the technique. So when I try to do a technique with them, it might in some instance not work at all, and in some cases because I did not do the technique properly or that I was concerned of them getting hurt. But in this scenario, it’s a learning process where I try to adapt to their unknown convention and hopefully show them some conventions.

Another example is when two experienced aikidoists practice together but with too much anticipation. It's easy to forget that we follow to the letter some convention with the technique but we lose sometimes the true nature of the technique. It is easy to fall into a routine when you practice with the same few partners. It's important that both parties at some point be ready to give feedback or resist to the technique or even do reversal if warranted. I see this type of practice as a progression, after the warm up and hopefully to increase awareness.

So, I agree with Sempai, that Aikido is a "Martial Art" with conventions that we are trying to learn from and follow but also to stay in a state of consciousness at a higher level.



Elias Marvinney performs kokyuu nage during his 2nd kyu exam, Nov 23, 2013. Picture by Guy Michelier

Gothenburg - Oct 19, 20 2013

Martin Dubcovsky

In October I had the pleasure of accompanying Sensei when he was invited to to teach a weekend seminar in Gothenburg, Sweden. It was a short trip, and while I did not have too much chance to explore the city or the Swedish culture, I came away with a great appreciation for the dedication of the Swedish aikidoka, many new friends, and plenty of inspiration to fuel my training.

Our hosts were Jan Bratt Sensei and Pia Moberg Sensei, the dojocho of Riai Aikido of Gothenburg. This seminar was a very special occasion as it marked the 10th anniversary of their dojo. When they left their old dojo, it was because they were ready to take their practice to the next level and make a commitment to teaching and promoting aikido. Together they established a set of goals they wanted to accomplish within their first 10 years.

- Train at least one student from beginning to Shodan.
- Establish a dojo in an elevated space with good light, and big windows.
- Have at least ten students.

Suburi & Kata

Even though there is no target or uke,
Strike as if cutting through a target
Thrust as if piercing through a target
Practice the kata as if with an uke.

It was by these metrics that they would measure their success, and after ten years, if they had not reached their goals they would give up and return to their old dojo. Happily that won't be necessary, as today they can say their 10 year experiment has been a complete success!

- From the students who started at their dojo they have graduated 6 shodan.
- They have a beautifully renovated dojo up on a hill.
- The Riai dojo boasts more than 40 adult students, and 30 junior students.

Kiai

The quality of techniques depends on the quality of your energy,
 The quality of your energy depends on how much intent you put into it.
 To boost your energy with your intent, do a kiai at appropriate moments,
 Such as at the beginning and at the end of the technique.

This tremendous accomplishment is not just for Jan and Pia to celebrate, but for all the members of their dojo. I was blown away when they told me of all the work the members put in when they moved into their new location. Everyone volunteered for months to redo the flooring, install a kitchen, paint the walls, crafting the shomen, putting in dressing rooms, installing showers, setting up a sauna, and even raising the ceiling! As a reward for their hard labor they not only have a beautiful dojo, but also a very tight knit community that knows how to work together.

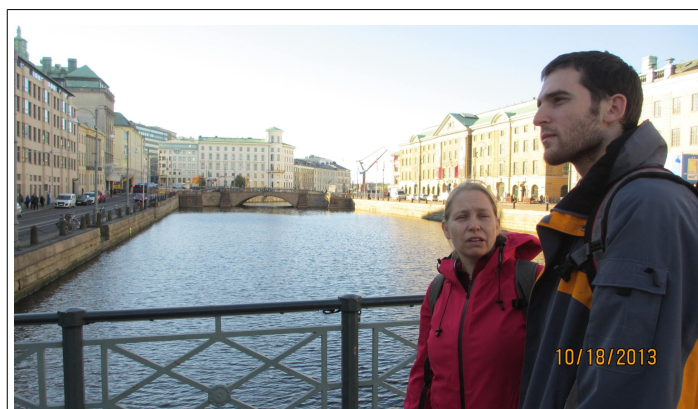
And work we did!

The two day seminar brought together aikidoka from all over Sweden, Denmark, and even a few travelers from Russia. With a crowd too large for the Riai dojo, the event was held at a nearby Judo club with a very large training hall. Some of the people there had traveled far in order to see Sensei again, some having just trained with him when he taught in Denmark. But the majority were meeting Sensei for the first time and

it was clear he had a deep effect on them. Many commented to me afterwards how much his technique and teaching style reminded them of Saito Sensei. The clarity of Sensei's technique and instruction is a rare and wondrous gift and everyone I trained with was very excited and grateful to have him there.

I even heard some half-joking apologies for stealing Sensei away from Davis, but I truly felt that I was the one who was taking from them. They had such a wonderful and invigorating training energy. It was infectious. Everyone was focused, training hard, and willing to set aside their normal training in order to absorb everything Sensei had to give. With two 4-hour days chock full of training it was hard not to feel inspired.

One thing I was particularly impressed with was the quality of their weapons work. By and large, their form was very crisp and bespoke of plenty of suburi practice. While working on the 31-jo kata paired practice, I was partnered with a fairly new student who had never done the practice before. But thanks to his familiarity with basic suburi, he was able to follow along and enjoy the practice. This is exactly how the Iwama pedagogy is supposed to work, and it was really neat to see it play out so clearly.



Pia Moberg Sensei and Martin enjoying a tour of the old Gothenburg merchant quarter. Picture By Hoa Newens Sensei



Jan Ng demonstrating kokyuu nage during her 2nd kyu exam Nov. 23, 2013. Picture by Guy Michelier.

the world. And of course a great many thanks to Pia Sensei and Jan Sensei for giving us a great tour of Gothenburg, allowing me to participate in one of their kids classes, and for their dedication to the global aikido community.

Tame The Animal Within

Toby Hargreaves

In the practice of Aikido, or any martial art, we get very close to a very primal side of ourselves. This side is a part of us that is capable of hurting or killing another being. It is a side that we are trained to suppress and control from an early age, but it is still there. One can see that average people are capable of atrocious violence when put in extreme circumstances like war. We all have that capability to do harm inside us, and we come face to face with it in the martial arts. This primal aggression is often triggered when we perceive a threat. It is the cornered animal that becomes ferocious in order to defend itself. We are biologically wired to defend ourselves by fighting. When threatened, adrenaline pumps through our veins, our senses are heightened; we are in a state of readiness. This response allows us to survive many dangers; however, we also have the potential to lose control when in this state, and do something against our better judgment. It is this loss of control, loss of balance, loss of good judgment that we are working on in our training. In our training we simulate these attack situations in order to call up this triggered

response--in a controlled and safe environment, the dojo—and practice not letting it get the better of us.

For most of us actual fighting situations are rare. But if we take our training to a finer level, we can learn to control our responses to the smaller, more frequent attacks; things that stress you, irritate you or throw you

Coming back from the trip I felt a bit tired, but really pumped up from the training. It was incredible to meet strangers from halfway across the world and have an instant connection through our common love of aikido. Of course I know that there are others out there practicing, but to see it in person was eye opening. The aikido family that we belong to is large and full of wonderful people. I for one certainly plan to increase my visits to other dojos; I am just so excited to share my training with everyone!

A special thank you to Daniel Lodeiro who opened his home to me and stayed up late in to the night discussing the state of aikido in Japan and around

Stances

Hanmi, ken kamae and tsuki kamae are stances That are not at-rest stances but ready stances.

In each stance, be connected energetically with the target,

Keep your central axis in the center and be prepared to move in any direction,

Forward, backward, left, right, up or down.

You should feel like a cat preparing to jump on its prey.



Tenkan - By Tonio Günther

off balance just a little. For example, someone makes a remark you find insulting or does something inconsiderate. You go out of your way to be helpful and no one recognizes your effort, so you feel sullen. You are late for an appointment and get stuck in traffic. Your boss pressures you at work to do more than you feel you can handle.

All of these stresses can trigger the animal side of us to react with some kind of emotion—anger, frustration, spite, despair—and we feel out of control. The interesting thing is that there is a way out of this cycle-- it is called training. Think about a CIA agent or an astronaut. They are trained to cope with all kinds of stresses and have to keep their cool—their life depends on it.

Most of the time we are not faced with life or death situations, yet our actions always have consequences and effects on others. Think about the harm one can do with a few careless words.

The Founder said “True victory is self victory.” I think what he meant by that is that we have to gain control over the part of ourselves that we don’t yet have control over.

Ukemi on the Mat

- Form a ball with the arms
- Form a ball with the legs
- To roll, merge the two balls into a third one that includes the entire body,
- Separate the two balls and stand up to return to hanmi.

The Perfection of Imperfection

Christine Palmer

Let me start with an admission. I'm a recovering overachiever, and worse still, a perfectionist. My parents taught me to be respectful, to tell the truth, to do the right thing, and above all, to work hard. All good things. Western culture, however, taught me that I needed to be perfect, to be the best, to achieve flawlessly at everything I undertook. And being from a small town, it wasn't particularly hard to be the best at everything. Let's be honest, in a footrace almost anyone can handily outrun a dairy cow. But life has a way of providing lessons we weren't even aware we needed. I needed to learn to be imperfect, to fail to be flawless, to make mistakes and come up short. And above all, to learn to see the beauty in these things and through them learn compassion and understanding of myself and of others.

Centered movement

Create the movement by moving the central axis,

While using the arms and legs as connectors.

The legs connect you to the ground,

The arms connect you to the weapon or uke's body.

Keep the central axis strong and the connectors flexible but firm.

Do not use the connectors to initiate movement.

Years have gone by, and I certainly have gotten the failing part down pat. I'm a scientist, and a secret of the trade is that many experiments will actually fail. And in each failure there is a lesson, a place to improve, a hint at what is going on underneath. But while I can see this in my science, it is challenging to apply that same logic to one's self. When I fail personally, it is hard to remember that it is a lesson, a place to improve, a hint at what is going on

underneath. Instead, it feels like coming up short, letting others down, and being a deplorable dud. When others fail, it is easy to be supportive and compassionate and encourage them to try again. When I fail, it is extremely hard to do the same for myself.



*Beginner's Course Graduation Ceremony
From left: Naomi Hayashi, Toru Saito, Christine Palmer, Jennifer Ji, Zachary Atlee, Yanin Swangruijithum. Picture by Guy Michelier*

Aikido is turning out to be one of the greatest [unexpected] forces to helping that change. There is something incredible that happens on the mat, as you bow and leave your "other problems" behind. I find myself surrounded by a group of people with palpable warmth and seemingly endless patience and good nature. From the very start, I wanted to do well, to honor their instruction. To fail them was even worse than failing myself. And yet.....suddenly the word "fail" seems incorrect. I'd like to replace "fail" with "do another version". A number of sempai have imparted this thought, and I feel so grateful that it seems to have come with me off the mat. You do not "fail" or do something "wrong", you simply did "a different version". True, the cookies were meant to be chewy, but you overcooked them and now they are crispy. Not a failure, just "a different version". And in

each of those versions, there is something to learn. About yourself, about others, and about seeing the world a little more openly, to regard "different versions" with a bit more compassion and gratitude.

My deepest and most sincere thanks to the incredible people of this dojo for their kindness, patience, guidance, and warmth. It couldn't be more, well, perfect.

Kihon waza

Keep the movement simple, slow and with little power.

Repeat the same movement many times for a long time

To create a template and constantly reinforce it.

This template is stored in the body as a feeling.

Once the feeling is strong, you can add speed, power and variations to the technique.

Later on, when you need to execute the technique, just recall its signature feeling.

Awase Seminar - Nov 9, 2013

Martin Dubcovsky

This special seminar was hosted by Pat Hendricks Sensei dojocho of Aikido of San Leandro, long time student of Saito Sensei, and the head of California Aikido Association's Division One. What made this seminar quite unique was that it brought together a cohort of instructors who all have a long history with Saito Sensei and deep familiarity and understanding with the Iwama style and pedagogy. In addition to Pat Hendricks Sensei, the guest instructors were Kim Peuser Sensei (Aikido Institute Oakland), Hoa Newens Sensei (Aikido Institute Davis), and Bernice Tom Sensei (Sunset Cliffs Aikido). With just an hour with each teacher, it felt like hardly enough time to cram in all the great instruction and fun training.

With so many people from different dojo and associations, it can be difficult to get people training productively. But thanks to the training roots shared by the instructors, and by extension all their students,



Roseville Seminar - Sept 28, 2013. Thanks to Kevin Kemper Sensei for hosting, to Hoa Newens Sensei for teaching, and to everyone who turned out in support! Picture by Guy Michelier.

we were able to dive right in. It was not necessary for the instructors to spend their time ensuring common and safe practice methods. Being able to trust a common understanding among the students, the instructors were able to dig deeper into the techniques they each presented. It was never *just kokyuu ho*, instead it was a rich exploration of *kokyuu ho*. While none of the instructors presented anything technically complex, what was presented was at a high level of detail, focus, and intensity.

It was a great chance to reconnect with old friends, and meet plenty of new ones. Attending from Davis were Donny Shiu, Remy Cordier, Kori Farrell, and Toby Hargreaves. This event bringing together the California Aikido Association and the Takemusu Aikido Association may well become an annual, and I would encourage everyone to support it in years to come.

Stay Vigilant and Stay Hungry

Donny Shiu

I find that as one achieves a certain level of competence, weaknesses can more easily be neglected. As the more you know, overconfidence and neglect can creep in. Regardless of rank or accomplishments, one can always improve. You just have to have the desire.

Maintaining and improving on the skills that you have already acquired is a given. Confidence grows as one's body of knowledge and skills become bigger. Feeling comfortable and confident is good, but don't let it blind you to weaknesses that remain and/or those you are unaware of. Be vigilant of what you don't know and cannot do. The responsibility to seek out and work on what you don't know rests on the individual. It is your training after all!

It's never easy to face one's weaknesses, but that is where growth comes from. No pain no gain. Beyond one's comfort zone is where the gems are. I find it fun to go to class to learn and to be reminded of what I don't know -- keeping that beginner's mind.

"The best swordsman in the world doesn't need to fear the second best swordsman in the world; no, the person for him to be afraid of is some ignorant antagonist who has never had a sword in his hand before..." -- Mark Twain



Guy Michelier with Hoa Newens Sensei upon receiving his shodan. Congratulations Guy!

Using the Central Axis to Move

- Move laterally by pushing one leg into the ground using the hips muscle (psoas)
- Move in circle by rotating the central axis using the hips muscles
- Move vertically by sinking the hips or opening the hips vertically
- Propel or absorb by lightly bending the central axis into a spring-loaded arc.
- At all times, keep the central axis aligned with gravity, that is, vertical.

Announcements

Beginner's Course: the Beginner's Course starts Tuesday Jan 14th. The class meets every Tuesday and Thursday 6:00-6:50pm for 8 weeks. This course is only \$100, and is designed as an introduction to aikido for anyone regardless of age or gender. To get the most out of the course, uninterrupted attendance is recommended. Visit our website for more information.

Tahoe Gasshuku: May23-25, 2014. Keeping up with our annual tradition, we will be renting a cabin for any interested dojo members. Although it may seem far away, its not too early to start planning for this big event. Online registration opens January.

Promotions

Congratulations to the following students for their recent promotions:

Guy Michelier	1st Dan
Elias Marvinney	2nd Kyu
Jan Ng	2nd Kyu
Christine Palmer	6th Kyu
Jennifer Ji	6th Kyu
Naomi Hayashi	6th Kyu
Toru Saito	6th Kyu
Yanin Swangruthum	6th Kyu
Zachary Atlee	6th kyu



Note from the editor: All formatting, spelling and grammatical errors are unintended and the sole responsibility of the editor—My apologies!
-Martin Dubcovsky